



**Department of
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News Release

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VA Black Hills Health Care System Tailors Plan to Expand Mental Health Staff

HCS to Hire Seven as Part of Nationwide Boost

VA Black Hills HCS, South Dakota – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki recently announced the department would add approximately 1,600 mental health clinicians as well as nearly 300 support staff to its existing workforce. VA estimates that five clinicians and two support personnel will be hired to support mental health operations at VA Black Hills Health Care System. Funding has now been distributed to VA Black Hills and recruitment is underway.

VA has an existing workforce of 20,696 mental health staff that includes nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers. Currently, 144 mental health clinicians and support staff work locally supporting South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana and North Dakota Veterans.

With each additional mental health care provider, a facility could potentially reach hundreds more Veterans battling mental illness. New providers will join a team that is already actively treating Veterans through individualized care, readjustment counseling, and immediate crisis services. Additional staff members also afford opportunities to look long-term and expand into cutting edge Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) research and to explore alternative therapies.

Secretary Shinseki noted that “as the tide of war recedes, we have the opportunity, and the responsibility, to anticipate the needs of returning Veterans.”

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HIRE Therapists 2/2/2

VA anticipates the majority of mental health clinicians and support staff will be hired locally within approximately six months and the most hard-to-fill positions filled by the end of the second quarter of FY 2013. To speed the hiring process, VA developed the Mental Health Hiring Initiative to improve marketing, recruitment, and hiring efforts for mental health professionals so that the new 1,600 mental health providers can be hired as quickly as possible. The initiative is an aggressive, multi-faceted, sustained national marketing and outreach campaign that includes targeted recruitment of mental health providers willing to take positions in rural and highly rural markets, as well as throughout the nation to serve all VA medical centers and community clinics.

“Mental health services must be closely aligned with Veterans’ needs and fully integrated with health care facility operations,” said VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Robert Petzel. “Improving access to mental health services will help support the current and future Veterans who depend on VA for these vital services.”

Last year, VA provided quality, specialty mental health services to 1.3 million Veterans. Since 2009, VA has increased the mental health care budget by 39 percent. Since 2007, VA has seen a 35 percent increase in the number of Veterans receiving mental health services, and a 41 percent increase in mental health staff.

Interested mental health care providers can find additional information about VA careers online at www.va.careers.va.gov. Open positions will be announced online at USA Jobs (www.usajobs.gov).

To locate the nearest VA facility or Vet Center for enrollment and to get scheduled for care, Veterans can visit VA’s website at www.va.gov. Immediate help is available at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net or by calling the Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 (push 1) or texting 838255.

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